

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLYACTION

May 16, 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM:

A. Denis Clift



SUBJECT:

Soviet Internal Political Situation

There have been several rumors in recent days that Brezhnev's position has been imperiled by recent setbacks to Soviet foreign policy.

Working with State/INR (Hyland) and CIA, I have prepared the information memorandum for your signature to the President at Tab A noting the rumors and advising that there is little to support them and that Brezhnev would still appear to be firmly in control of the Soviet leadership.

The memorandum may be of interest to the President on the eve of his meeting with the high-level delegation of Soviet Parliamentarians.

RECOMMENDATION

That you sign the memorandum at Tab A.

MORI C03352382

State Dept. review completed

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XGDS

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

SECRET/SENSITIVEINFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Current Soviet Leadership Situation

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Summary.

A careful reading of the evidence does not suggest that recent developments have generated such conflict in the Politburo as to threaten Brezhnev's position; to alter the leadership balance in other ways; or to call into question Soviet commitment to detente.

While Brezhnev has not been too much in evidence for the past several days, it is probable that he has been participating in deliberations on a number of important issues including the upcoming Supreme Soviet elections, a possible CC Plenum and review of the USSR's long-range economic plan. His most recent message to you on the Middle East would serve to confirm that he is fully in command on his internal front.

Background. Recent events -- the accession of Wilson, the death of Pompidou, the resignation of Brandt, and US initiatives in the Middle East -- cannot help but have generated unforeseen, thorny problems for the Politburo. But while the Soviet leaders must currently feel that the results of their detente policy have both positive and negative aspects, the advantages of detente in their eyes, such as recognition of Soviet superpower status, most likely outweigh its disadvantages. There seems to be a fairly solid consensus behind Brezhnev's detente approach and he himself appears well entrenched. He was at center stage on May Day, easily outdistanced his colleagues in the number of honorary nominations to the Supreme Soviet, and continues to receive ever more laudatory praise from them.

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There are, however, observable differences of view in the leadership. Individual leaders vary in the warmth of their public endorsements of detente, though none have voiced opposition. At a lower level, there are signs of a debate over such issues as the attainability of victory in nuclear war which is reminiscent of the conflict which raged under Khrushchev. There are also several recent anomalies from standard practices for which we have no satisfactory explanations, such as the failure of Brezhnev or any other leader to give a May Day speech and the last minute cancellation of the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the USSR Academy of Sciences to which hundreds of foreign dignitaries had been invited.

Conclusion. It does not appear that a major struggle is developing: the economy is generally performing well, even allowing for somewhat lowered crop prospects, the Solzhenitsyn controversy is abating, and dissent is increasingly controlled.

Age and ill health remain as the most likely possibilities for any change in the Soviet leadership over the near term. Brezhnev is now 67 and, while his health is reasonably good for a man of his years, his stamina is declining. He continues, however, to lead an active public life and on May 12 addressed his wartime comrades-in-arms.

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